

The Camp Buc Story

A History of Camp Buc
Located in
Transylvania County, North Carolina

By
Reverend Ralph L. Buchanan

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For some time Mr. Ernest "Hawk" Evans has been urging me to write a history of Camp Buc. Hawk was one of the main people who realized the value of and need for a Presbytery camp and was one of its greatest promoters, backers, and supporters.

This story is being written entirely from memory after thirty years. I left the presbytery in June 1971. However, in the main, the information given herein will be found to be accurate.

One of the main objectives emphasized in my call to serve as Executive Presbyter of Piedmont Presbytery was that I was to find a site and build a camp. This was a challenging task when combined with my other responsibilities.

We began our endeavor by selecting a Camp Committee. Among those who served on this Committee were Fred Bremer, A.B. Plexico, Ronald McElrath, Foster Edwards, Phil Cramer, Theo Mattison, Hawk Evans, Bruce Rochester, Pat Wiley, Guy Cromer, Stokes Alexander, Jack Ragsdale, John Hoilman, Hardin King, and there were others. The personnel of the Committee changed as members rotated off and new ones came on. Everything that was done toward the camp was done under the supervision of the Committee.

We began our search for a campsite by getting aerial photo maps of upper South Carolina and Western North Carolina. On these photo maps all privately owned property was indicated in white. The US government owned a great portion of this area. To scout out these various sites, I would ask different ones to accompany me on numerous scouting expeditions. Among those who shared this experience were Fred Bremer, A.B. Plexico, Hawk Evans, Ronald McElrath, Phil Cramer and others. If a property appeared to have possibilities we would then take the entire Camp Committee and have them evaluate the site. In this manner we considered a couple dozen properties.

We finally found a tract of land composed of four hundred sixty two (462) acres situated on the headwaters of the Thompson River in Transylvania County, North Carolina. This acreage was almost completely surrounded by U.S. Forest Service land. The property had been owned by a man from Florida. He developed it into a ranch, built himself a palatial home, along with other out buildings. There was a nice lake on the property, but the dam broke and was never restored. The man died, the house later burned, the wife moved away and put the property on the market for sale. A Mr. Cook, a realtor in Highlands, North Carolina, and a Mr. Verner, a banker in Walhalla, South Carolina, bought the place as an investment. This property was judged to be ideal as a camp for Piedmont Presbytery by all who saw it.

Our next task was to persuade Piedmont Presbytery to approve the site and then authorize its purchase. To accomplish this end we did the following things in preparation for our presentation.

My good friend Fred Pearman had an airplane, so we got the photographer at the Anderson Independent and Daily Mail newspaper to go with us. Fred flew us over the property so we could get aerial photographs of the entire tract and its surroundings. We then prepared a colored slide presentation to show before Presbytery.

We then had Bob Davis, head of the camp and conference program of the old Presbyterian Church US come and evaluate the site. Mr. Davis said it was the most ideal site in the entire General Assembly, indicating that it had more of the qualities a good campsite should have than any he had seen.

We were able to get Presbytery to hold one of its meetings in the Bohaynee Baptist Church, only a couple of miles from the campsite. During the course of that meeting, the delegates visited the property, were impressed with its beauty and saw first hand its potential as a campsite. At a subsequent meeting of Piedmont Presbytery held at Williamston Presbyterian Church, the Committee made its presentation, including aerial photographs, the slide presentation, Bob Davis' evaluation of the site, several personal testimonies, and reference to the delegates' prior on-site visit. As a result of this presentation, Presbytery was so impressed that it voted overwhelmingly to approve the site and the purchase of the property.

Messrs. Cook and Verner, the owners, had agreed to sell the four hundred sixty two acres for \$50,000. They wanted a down payment of \$15,000 and the remaining \$35,000 balance to be paid in ten equal payments at an interest rate of 6%. We then launched an effort to raise the \$15,000 down payment. Hawk Evans and his father were the first to contribute, each giving \$1,000. Mr. Jack Ragsdale, a printer in Easley, prepared an attractive brochure composed of maps, pictures, and other pertinent information to be used in the fundraising effort and to inform people about the property and its suitability.

At this time, Duke Power Company was building an atomic power plant at the foot of the mountain. They came to us and indicated they would have to run a transmission line across the back of our property. We did not want this, but found that we could not prevent it. Duke Power agreed to pay us \$35,000 for this right-of-way and then lease it back for \$1 per year. With Duke Power's \$35,000 we had over \$50,000, and the property was paid for in full. Presbytery has only \$15,000 invested in this acreage now worth approximately \$1,000,000, considering the present value of the land in the Cashiers and Highlands area. Mr. Pat Miley, an attorney in Walhalla, did all our legal work at no charge.

During the time that Duke Power had plans to run the line across our property, I asked them to help us build a good entrance road into the site. The Company sent a bulldozer and motor grader and they worked for a week building roads, campsites, etc.

A great part of this work was done on the south side of the property. According to the master plan for the development of the property, this area was to be developed into a family camping area where families could bring their campers, tents, etc, and enjoy family camping in a beautiful setting.

On the occasion of my last visit to Duke Power's office in Charlotte, I was told that they had changed their plan and had no intention of running a transmission line across our property. We were most delighted to have this news. The Good Lord has been with us. He has guided and richly blessed us throughout this entire undertaking. Praises be to His Great and Holy Name.

Our Committee then employed a famous camp and conference designer and architect from Philadelphia, who came and prepared a master plan for the development of the property. He left us several copies of his plan. I don't remember the amount of his fee, but he was expensive. This man had designed camps for other presbyteries in our denomination.

According to this master plan the area on the North side of the river around the barn was to be developed for program camping, conferences and retreats. The area on the South side of the property was to be developed into a family camping area. This area had a separate entrance road that led off the state road near the North end of the bridge. After thirty years this road and the campsites are probably grown over with trees.

The Committee had several copies of this master plan for development of the property, but I understand that they have been lost. They probably exist somewhere, if they could just be found. Mr. Walter Mayfield of Central Church, Anderson, took charge of my office when I left Presbytery.

In the meantime, we wanted to get some temporary facilities on the property so we could begin having a camping program there instead of having to rent other camps. A well was bored, and Mr. Brice Rochester, a building contractor in Walhalla, converted the large barn into a kitchen, dining area, bathrooms and sleeping quarters in the loft area. We then bought lumber and other materials, and a Mr. Reed, a member of Central Church, Anderson, and who was head of the vocational program at T. L. Hanna High School, along with the boys in his classes, cut out several cabins which could accommodate around eight campers each. Various members of the Presbytery helped us get these materials to the site and build the cabins. With this done, we were in business. There would be no more renting of other presbyteries' camps.

Mr. Frank Lusk, a native of the area, along with his family, was living on and farming the property when Presbytery bought it. He continued to live there and served as our caretaker until we began using the site. Then he moved away and the Committee employed a camp director.

Additional information can be found in the Ragsdale brochure, a copy of which accompanies this history. It contains information about the projected growth of the area,

the road situation and other interesting facts. I am not familiar with other developments that have occurred at the camp since I left the Presbytery in 1971. However I do know that a lake has been built, as well as a home for the camp director.

Since the purchase of this property, there has been on it a lot of camping, hiking, picnicking, coon hunting, stargazing, Bible Study, meditating, prayer and worship. Here amid the handiwork of God, one's soul is cleansed and freed of distress and anxiety. As our world becomes more crowded and polluted, the people of Foothills Presbytery, as it is named today, will come to appreciate this remote and secluded spot more and more. Being surrounded by U.S. Forest Service lands, it cannot be encroached upon by diversions of our modern culture.

When the time came to dedicate and name the camp, Piedmont Presbytery met at the site. My family and I and several of my friends were invited to attend this happy event, at which there was a large crowd present. You cannot imagine my amazement and surprise when Presbytery graciously and generously voted to name the camp, "Camp Buc" in my honor. For this, my family and I are humbly and deeply grateful.

Respectfully,

Ralph L. Buchanan
Former Executive Secretary
and Parish Director
Piedmont Presbytery